

Man, Land, & Sea

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Tourism for Tasi



Leveraging the tourism industry to protect Guam's coral reefs

BSP IN ACTION 4



- Training
- Islandwide Cleanup

Protecting Guam from Ridge to Reef



Governor's MESSAGE

Our island faces many challenges in preparing for the future. One of the most important is the responsibility we have to preserve our island's environmental heritage for generations to come. Our natural environment is the foundation for our economy and our way of life as a people. Protecting our environment is essential to building a sustainable and prosperous community.

Our Administration has embarked on several initiatives to advance the cause of a clean and sustainable environment. Last June, a new Coral Reef Resiliency Strategy was implemented to provide a more proactive approach to protect our reefs against threats to this critical component of Guam's natural infrastructure. By Executive Order, I also established a new Climate Change Resiliency Commission that will provide a comprehensive approach to address the challenges presented by climate change. We are also working on expanding and upgrading existing planning, data collection, and regulatory programs to provide for a clean and sustainable environment.

Essential to this effort is the Guam Coastal Zone Management Program of the Bureau of Statistics and Plans. Their work involves land use planning, environmental review, oversight of development projects for compliance with federal and local laws, and providing solutions to community problems such as flooding, erosion, and the preservation of Guam's natural charm and beauty.

I commend the staff of the Bureau of Statistics and Plans for their contributions and encourage all those who care about Guam's future to get involved.

Si Yu'os Ma'åse!

Loures Guerrero
LOURDES A. LEON GUERRERO
Maga'hågan Guåhan
Governor of Guam

“Protecting our environment is essential to building a sustainable and prosperous community.”



Tourism for Tasi

By Mallory Morgan, National Coral Reef Management Fellow,
Bureau of Statistics and Plans

Leveraging the tourism industry
to protect Guam's coral reefs

Guam received a record
number of tourists in 2017 with
1.56 million visitors, and arrival
numbers continue to increase
[Guam Visitors Bureau (GVB 2018)]

Over 30% of these visitors cite the marine environment as a top reason for visiting Guam (GVB 2018). Meanwhile, Guam lost 32% of living coral cover on the shallow seaward slopes between 2013 and 2017 (Burdick 2019). As tourism grows, so will pressure on Guam's coral reefs. Effective and collaborative management is needed to reduce negative impacts from tourism and recreational use.

Guam's coral reefs support coastal infrastructure, recreational opportunities, subsistence and commercial fisheries, cultural heritage, and the local economy. Reef-related tourism on Guam's coral reefs is estimated to generate \$323 million annually (Mapping Ocean Wealth Portal, The Nature Conservancy 2016). Unfortunately, Guam's coral reefs and the benefits they provide are under threat from global and local stressors such as climate change, over fishing, land-based sources of pollution, irresponsible land use practices, and tourism and recreational use.

Considering the benefits derived from coral reefs and marine tourism on Guam, the Bureau of Statistics and Plans hosted a series of reef safe marine tourism workshops from May 17 – 23rd, 2019. The initiative was branded 'Tourism for Tasi.' For purposes of the workshops, reef safe marine tourism was defined as *"marine tourism that includes actions or behaviors that minimize reef damage and protect the health of the reef."*

Three workshops were convened over an eight-day period and included 127 participants representing 25 businesses, 11 government agencies, 9 community /nonprofit/academia groups, and 6 elected officials.

Collectively, the workshops aimed to:

- 1) Provide up to date information on the status and threats to Guam's coral reefs;
- 2) Develop a shared vision for the future of reef safe marine tourism;
- 3) Identify the most common threats and key barriers to reef safe tourism;
- 4) Develop priority strategies to foster reef safe marine tourism on Guam.



"Guest speaker Ashton Williams from the National Park Service and UOG Marine Lab presents her research on Guam discussing impacts of scuba diving on coral reefs." Photo credit: Christian Benitez, BSP

The first workshop was held on Friday, May 17, 2019 at the Guam Museum. This first workshop was designed as a stakeholders' forum to bring together a diversity of voices from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. There were 65 participants representing 11 government agencies, 15 businesses, 8 nonprofit organizations, and 6 elected officials. The goal was to ensure input from different perspectives while illuminating the competing interest and multitude of concerns requiring attention.

Presentations described the current threats to Guam's reefs, a status update on the current condition of our reefs, information about various existing management initiatives, and an overview of rules and regulations relevant to the marine tourism industry. Time was spent in small groups to discuss and identify the key barriers to reef safe tourism from different stakeholder perspectives.

The top barriers identified were

- 1) A lack of enforcement,
- 2) Unlicensed vendors and lack of incentive for following reef safe practices when others don't,
- 3) Lack of effective communications about reef safe behavior.



The second workshop was held the following week on Wednesday, May 22, 2019 at the Marianas Yacht Club. This workshop was customized specifically for staff-level workers such as boat captains, dive instructors, dive and snorkel guides, and office staff. This session was attended by 41 representatives from 14 businesses and 4 government agencies. The goal of this workshop was to educate staff about coral reef ecology, review impacts from marine tourism, and provide ideas on how businesses can reduce their impact.

Marine tour operator staff were also engaged in discussions to identify

- 1) The most common threats from marine tourism they witness,
- 2) Opportunities they see for sharing information with guests to reduce threats,
- 3) Communications products and approaches they believe will help convey key messages.

Thirty-one participants signed a pledge committing to practice a variety of reef safe practices such as offering reef safe sunscreen to guests, displaying more reef safe guidance on their website and in the shop, and establishing a no-contact policy for staff and guests. Attendees were provided with resources to help address recreational impacts such as a guidebook of best management practices for marine tour operators, a self-assessment checklist for managing impacts, and Green Fins briefing cards and posters to communicate reef-safe behavior in English, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean.



"The May 22 staff education workshop at the Marianas Yacht Club was well attended. Presentations, mapping exercises, small group discussions kept attendees busy."
Photo credit: Sonia Siliang, BSP

The third workshop was held Thursday, May 23, 2019 also at the Marianas Yacht Club. This workshop was targeted towards business owners and managers to catalyze action. There were 21 attendees representing 12 businesses and 4 government agencies.

The goal of this workshop was to develop and refine the most feasible strategies to support reef safe tourism on Guam. To do this, case studies were shared to exemplify how other places around the region and the world address some of the key threats and barriers to reef safe tourism identified in the prior workshops. Small groups then developed priority strategies that could help overcome these threats and barriers on Guam. These included strategies to overcome barriers around lack of enforcement, unlicensed and illegal operations, and lack of communications to address common threats.

Together, participants throughout the workshops produced the following Guam Marine Tour Operators Vision Statement:

As marine tour operators, we envision Guam's coral reefs providing plentiful fish, food, and income into the future. We envision our industry comprised only of operators who are proud of our resources, practice sustainability, and share these values with our guests to instill respect for our coral reefs. Our guests will leave their experience impressed and appreciative of the beauty of Guam's marine environment. To move toward this future vision, we will continue to protect our marine environment by participating in cleanups, monitoring, and being mindful of how our activities impact our reefs. Looking to the future, we see increased collaboration with our government, communities, and visitors to lead policy, enforcement, and strategic communications to ensure all marine tourism on Guam is Reef Safe.

The Bureau of Statistics and Plans would like to sincerely thank the many businesses, government agencies, and community groups that invested their time to participate in these workshops.

A final summit will be held at the end of the year to highlight progress and share lessons learned as stakeholders begin implementing strategies from the workshops. A Strategy Document titled "Improving Reef-Safe Marine Tourism on Guam" will also be released and shared at the end of the summer. BSP's Coral Fellow Mallory Morgan will continue to provide support to marine tour operators as they work towards creating a more sustainable, reef-safe marine tourism industry on Guam.

To learn more or get involved, please contact Mallory at Mallory.morgan@bsp.guam.gov



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BSP IN ACTION



On September 4, the Bureau of Statistics and Plans sponsored a training course for marine and coastal resource managers conducted by the Duke University School of Environment. The Marine Planning Program course was carried out over 2 days and was held at UOG



As part of the Island wide Bus Stop Cleanup in preparation for the new school year, government agencies were mobilized last August to help. Employees from the Bureau of Statistics and Plans (BSP) cleaned up this bus stop along Fatima Road in Dededo.



<https://bsp.guam.gov/guam-coastal-management-program/>